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## ANOTHER EXPERIMENT IN PROBLEM TEACHING

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Having placed fourth-year English as experimented upon in 1915-16 in the hands of an English teacher, I have endeavored this year to test the effectiveness of the problem method in third-year high-school English work.

Our problem or project aimed to fill a crying need in a small high school of one hundred and seventy students on the Iron Range in northeastern Minnesota. Two years ago a weekly paper called the *Ranger* was started by the printing instructor and a group of students. The work was well done but proved an arduous task in so small a school, inasmuch as it was independent of regular accredited work. What should be done with the *Ranger* was a question that faced the school and me last fall. When English III met for its first class period I put before them the proposition of editing the *Ranger* as an English project. We concluded to look it over thoroughly and think it out before deciding. After several days of discussion this decision was reached: We would study the project until November first, at which time we would be ready to issue a high-school publication from our own printshop. Since we did not know the type of publication we wished to put out, we began studying newspapers and magazines with a view to deciding.

Our class work for a month consisted of bringing to a head our observation, information, and inspiration concerning magazines and newspapers. Four times a week we met as an English class in a forty-five-minute session; once a week the whole class took a double period in the printshop under a regular printing teacher. This four-and-one arrangement we have maintained. There was, moreover, no limit to the extra time any student might spend in the printshop, provided he kept his other work aboveboard. It was not at all unusual for several of the boys to spend hours in the shop over and above the required time.

Soon we began to bring our newspaper and magazine study to a focus by discussing what type of publication to essay. A week was spent in observation of how such magazines as the *Literary Digest*, *Review of Reviews*, *World's Work*, *Survey*, *Independent*, and *New Republic* were organized as to classification of material, for example. Then we pursued the same consideration of the *Atlantic Monthly*, *Harper's*, *Everybody's*, and the *American*. Finally we brought all of our observations to a head, with the result that a monthly magazine was decided upon, departments were created, heads of these departments were elected, and the class was divided under these heads so that each one of its twenty-three members fitted in definitely somewhere. In fact, the business management, part of the type-setting, all of the composition, presswork, and assembling were done by English III alone. In writing for the magazine English III contributed all of the department "write-ups." Contributions from the whole school were sought for, encouraged, and secured, but all went through the several departments before acceptance. This plan of procedure evolved before and during the publication of our first number in November.

In our more or less cursory study of current magazines we became interested in the short story as an important literary feature of the modern American magazine. We read rather generally along that line—stories of Irving, Hawthorne, Harte, Kipling—and concluded by having each member of the class submit a plot, and then writing a short story. The class not only succeeded in doing this but foresaw that it would give us material from which to draw for our literary department for several issues. As it worked out, our short stories written by Thanksgiving were not exhausted until the March issue of the *Ranger*.

One of the notable features of these was their local color. The students began to find "copy," to find "stories" all about them. The best stories incidentally pictured our local industries, iron mining and lumbering, or school life. "The Chip-Boy" and "The Water-Boy" were minutely true in detail to the work of the "chip-boy" in underground mining and the "water-boy" in open-pit mining. Excellent bits of description made vivid an otherwise commonplace story, "The Chip-Boy":

Mike lit his carbide lamp and descended the twenty-foot ladders which led to the floor of the drift. Thence to his right he looked through the mouth of the drift into the outside world, but to his left far into the depths of the earth. From far in came the deep "thump" of picks striking the ore, and less oftener a heavy "thud" which blocked the ears and shook the ground. This was the blast.

Actual vernacular, the talk of the pits, made "The Water-Boy" more than the usual high-school theme. "'Gee, that's great!' says he, 'I'm goin' to find Jim Wessen.'" School life found adequate expression from a girl in the class in the story, "His First Long Pants." Even the aspirations of those students who had already decided upon their work after leaving high school found expression through these short stories. One sixteen-year-old boy who aspires to journalism wrote a by no means ordinary sketch about a young reporter.

In this journalistic study we found that we needed knowledge of types of writing, especially newspaper types. Accordingly, after a search among schoolbook publications, we found three for reference work and secured several copies of each: *Typical Newspaper Stories* by Harrington, *The Writing of News* by Ross, and Merle Thorpe's *The Coming Newspaper*. We also subscribed for the magazine the *Inland Printer* and found it valuable on the printing side of the work. By no means did we study all that any one of these books had to offer, however.

After our season with the short story we centered attention upon "plain news." We brought in well-written examples from such papers as the *Chicago Herald* and *Tribune*, read Harrington's discussion of plain news stories and his excellent illustrations of these, and wrote to a considerable extent, aiming at effectiveness, brevity, and clearness. In turn we studied feature and human-interest stories in much the same manner. Our results in the latter in particular proved creditable and can be seen in such bits as these here and there in the *Ranger*:

#### S. O. S. IN PRACTICE

The thermometer registered 22 degrees below zero, yet he had no mittens. He couldn't have been more than five years old, yet I'm certain that he was his mother's errand boy for what was that package on his sled? The common instinct of boyland drew a boy a little older to him.

"Wassa matter?" inquired the older.

"I'm cold," sobbed the other.

"Where's your mitts?"

"Left 'em home."

"Whyncha get 'em?"

"Oh, I live out ata location."

"Say, if you're so cold as that, I'll tell you what you kin do. Come on in my room. My teacher won't care."

"Awright," the other answered. "Gee, I wish it was Christmas. Ma promised me a pair of mitts. I spoiled the others playin' snow-ball."

"Serves you right," was the sage comment of the older. "I allus play shinney. That don't hurt your mitts."

The conversation was broken up at this point, for the older boy took the younger in. And yet some people insist that very little brotherly instinct exists in boys.

#### AND STILL HE SEEMED TO ENJOY HIMSELF

I expect you never saw it, and even if you did, you didn't pay much attention to it except to the fact that he was there. But still it was queer, for he limped and rarely twisted his neck and once in a while he'd put his hand up to his right jaw. But you couldn't suspect anything, for he danced and laughed and seemed to have the best time of his life, withal. Why, what is this all about? Oh! nothing—a boil, toothache, and a sore heel—that's all.

During this work a number of the class of twenty-three became so enthusiastic that my desk was constantly the recipient of human-interest sketches, poems, and even short stories, all without assignment. Students tried their hands and heads at writing this, that, or the other thing as it appealed to them. On the other hand, several became more interested in the printshop side of the subject and, as I have already mentioned, spent hours there in the evenings or on Saturday setting up something for the next issue.

After our first issue we were confronted with a definite problem: Should we have the recognized and ordinary type of high-school magazine such as the student body most enjoys, or should we have a little better than this student body would have if it had its own way? By this time we had established an exchange with about ten schools. The publications from these we dissected and compared. We read and discussed the symposium "Giving the Public What It Wants" in Thorpe's volume *The Coming Newspaper*. We considered for several weeks and concluded to err on the side of a

too-literary high-school publication rather than a too-popular one. Results have justified the course of action.

After Christmas our problem became complicated. Constant newspaper allusions, cartoon titles, editorials, and articles drew the attention of the best-read members of the class to the fact that we lacked adequate literary background. The exact way in which this need became obvious is interesting. We were centering attention upon the human-interest type of composition, bringing in newspaper clippings and reading illustrations from Harrington's *Typical Newspaper Stories*. Among the best ones read were two from the *Kansas City Star* which contained allusions to the *Pied Piper*, the *Brobdignags*, the *Bluebird*, and the *Cabbage Patch*. In explaining these allusions we came to the conclusion that one cannot get the most out of contemporary literature without a background. In the class itself then there came a feeling that right along with our regular *Ranger* work we should read some of the best literature. The question naturally arose as to where we should begin and how proceed. Here I had to do the deciding and accordingly chose moderns and poetry.

As a result we had one of the most interesting months of English work I have ever experienced, studying Browning and Kipling. We proceeded next to Stevenson, and after considering his poetry tarried to become acquainted with his short stories. Two or three of the class were yearning to write another short story, so Stevenson served as a source of inspiration to them. As a class we read and were prepared to discuss certain assigned poems and as many more than the assignment as was desired. For the most part the students read a number more than the assigned poems.

The study of Browning and Kipling led us to Wordsworth, Milton, and Shakespeare. We became interested in the ballad, sonnet, and simple lyric, and much verse was written by the class, the best, of course, appearing in the *Ranger*. Without suggestion in the beginning as to theme or form, such results as the following were accomplished. Of course there was the necessary revision before publication and the consequent improvement of meter and verse form. The ideas and expressions were original throughout.

## THE FOREIGNER

I wonder why the American always deigns to grin  
 When I say "da" for "the" and "tin" for "thin"?  
 I wonder why the American as though not kith and kin  
 Writes about the Bohunk and the Finn?

Writes about our language strange,  
 Writes about our customs alien,  
 Writes about our "company" homes upon "the Range"?

I wonder why the American stares at my wife and me  
 When we're down town ashopping or perchance a show to see?  
 I wonder why he always looks ('tis the same look I'll wager in,  
 That stands out clearly on his face).  
 "That's a Bohunk or a Finn?"  
 Either a Bohunk or a Finn,  
 What difference is't to him,  
 We each came here in steerage, either a Bohunk or a Finn, etc.

It would take me long and lead me far to tell of the varied interests in literary productions aroused and developed in this one year. One of our debating students, who took first place in a state discussion contest and was naturally capable of writing clear, easy, thoughtful prose, became interested in the "easy chair" type of expression. She studied the DeCoverley papers and Lamb's essays, as well as the editorials, book reviews, and prose articles of several of the best magazines. As she was a member of the literary staff of the *Ranger*, did not lean toward fiction, and was possessed of the name "Wall" she conceived the idea of writing a "Wall-Paper" of a different design for each issue. This plan, absolutely her own, she carried out, and the articles appeared month by month.

All this, however, does not tell you anything of the value of the work put in on the local department through the humorous column "The Sunny Side," through the articles about current events, through the school-happenings column, which we called "A Student View—by One." It tells you nothing about the athletic reporting in our section "Snap Shots by Snappy" and "ETC. by Scrub." It gives nothing of the hard work and thought that went into making our "Carrier Pigeon," the exchange department, interesting

through its "Look Here" column, which gave pertinent quotations from and on other high-school publications. Then too we had an art and music department with "Notes from Far and Near," and "My Eyes Make Pictures" for its special divisions.

In the spring, as the time for the Senior class play approached, we studied the drama, taking *As You Like It* and *Hamlet* for intensive consideration. In our last issue, a Senior number, we gave space to the publication of the entire Senior play, which, according to our problem teaching in English IV, was written by that class. Thus was our interest pointed toward the drama as the subject of problem work in the fourth year.

One of the noteworthy things about this project work has been the increase in literary judgment on the part of the students. They now know whether a magazine is first-class or merely popular. They also know as never before how broad the subject of English is. The class period became a clearing-house for ideas, opinions, and information. Someone perchance had just discovered a collection of poems called *The Woods*, by Douglas Mallock, relating to our own northern lumbering; someone wanted a class opinion of Jack Lait's work in the *Chicago Herald*, and so on, to keeping track of the work of Arthur Hayes received recently into the *Chicago Herald* family and not long since graduated from our own Chisholm High School.

We have been moving; we have found a vital purpose in every day's work. With a monthly publication to be issued never did we need to wonder, "What's the use of this?" or, "Where's the point of that?" We have studied authors and their work, not *about* them, for we have studied for inspiration to write something. Lecturers have been interviewed, other schools visited and written up, Range coaches talked with and quoted in athletic articles, and every high-school activity viewed in the light of its worth as news and the possibility of putting that news into first-class literary form.

In short, problem or project teaching in English III has eliminated all but vital study and pushed us to the liveliest, joyfulest, most endless English we have ever known.